Commission Streamlining Task Force

COREY COOK,

SAINT MARY'S COLLEGE OF CALIFORNIA

MAY 7, 2025

Boards and Commissions – Questions

- Accountability

- Transparency

- Participation

- Responsiveness

- Consensus-oriented decision-making

- Equity and inclusiveness and

- Effective resource management.

Boards and Commissions - Challenges

Official skepticism

Representation

Information

Purpose clarity

Role clarity

Opaque processes of appointment

Boards and Commissions – Some Sensible Reforms

Training and Evaluation

Purpose clarity

Role clarity

Appointment Process

Brisbane Declaration – Community Engagement

Affirms that community engagement is critical to effective, transparent and accountable governance in the public, community and private sectors.

Recognizes that community engagement is a two-way process:
- by which the aspirations, concerns, needs and values of citizens and communities are incorporated at all levels and in all sectors in policy development, planning, decision-making, service delivery and assessment; and
- by which governments and other business and civil society organisations involve citizens, clients, communities and other stakeholders in these processes.

Affirms that effective engagement generates better decisions, delivering sustainable economic, environmental, social and cultural benefits.

Arnstein's "Ladder of Citizen Participation"

8. Citizen Control

Residents can govern a program or an institution, be in full charge of policy and managerial aspects, and be able to negotiate the conditions under which 'outsiders' may change them.

7. Delegated Power

Citizens hold the significant cards to assure accountability of the program to them. To resolve differences, powerholders need to start the bargaining process rather than respond to pressure from the other end.

6. Partnership

Shared planning and decision-making responsibilities through such structures as joint policy boards, planning committees, and mechanisms for resolving impasses.

Degrees of citizen power

5. Placation

Limited degree of influence in a process. Citizens are merely involved only to demonstrate that they were involved. A few hand-picked 'worthy' individuals on boards, who are not accountable and can be easily outvoted and out manouvered

4. Consultation

Inviting citizens' opinions, when consultation processes is not combined with other modes of participation, and has no assurance that citizen concerns and ideas will be taken into account.
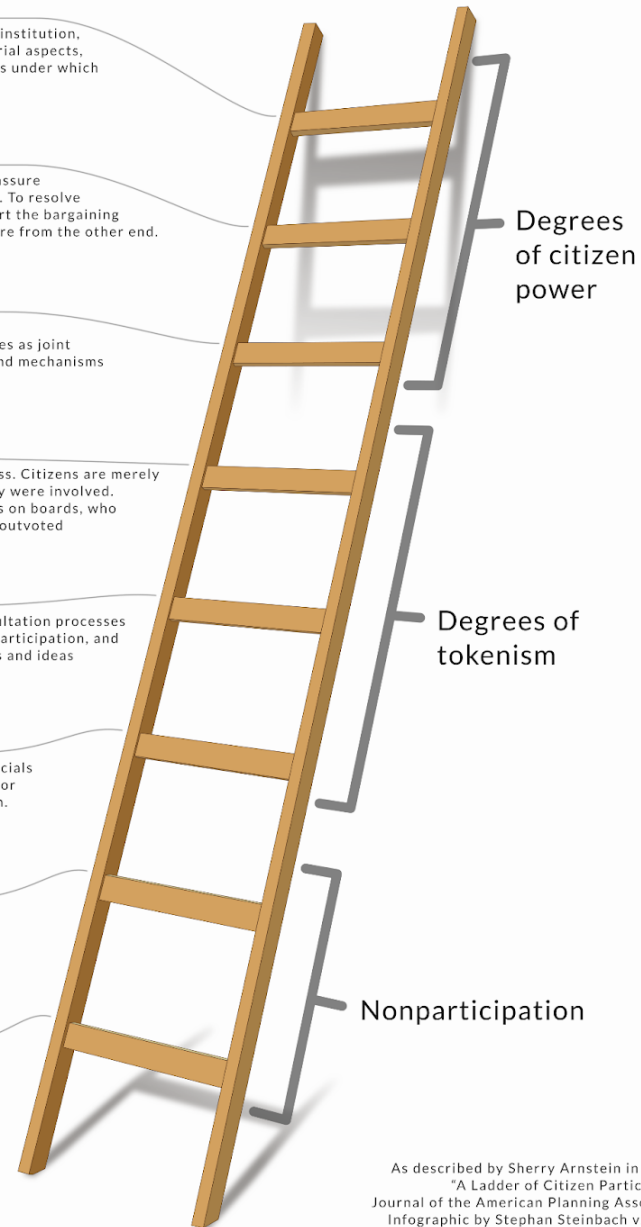
Degrees of tokenism

3. Informing

One-way flow of information from officials to citizens, with no channel provided for feedback and no power for negotiation.
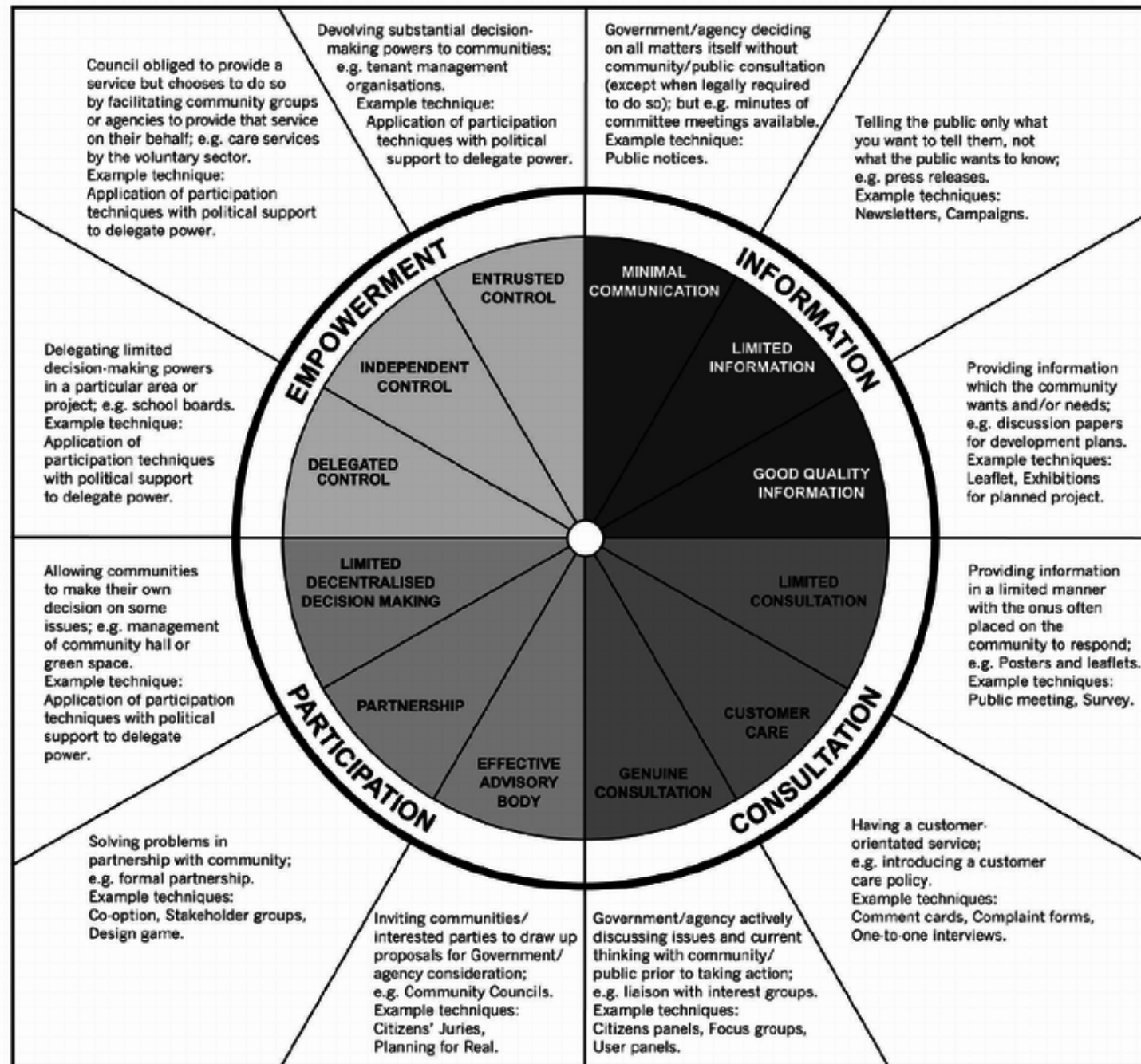
2. Therapy

Pseudo-participatory programs that attempt to convince citizens that they are the problem.
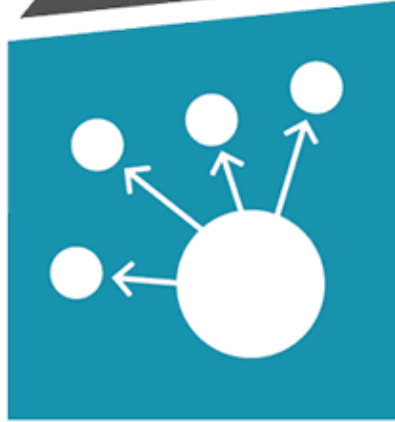
1. Manipulation

Rubber stamp advisory committees with purpose of engineering support.

Nonparticipation

Council obliged to provide a service but chooses to do so by facilitating community groups or agencies to provide that service on their behalf; e.g. care services by the voluntary sector. Example technique: Application of participation techniques with political support to delegate power.

Devolving substantial decision-making powers to communities; e.g. tenant management organisations. Example technique: Application of participation techniques with political support to delegate power.

Government/agency deciding on all matters itself without community/public consultation (except when legally required to do so); but e.g. minutes of committee meetings available. Example technique: Public notices.

Telling the public only what you want to tell them, not what the public wants to know; e.g. press releases. Example techniques: Newsletters, Campaigns.

Delegating limited decision-making powers in a particular area or project; e.g. school boards. Example technique: Application of participation techniques with political support to delegate power.

Providing information which the community wants and/or needs; e.g. discussion papers for development plans. Example techniques: Leaflet, Exhibitions for planned project.

Allowing communities to make their own decision on some issues; e.g. management of community hall or green space. Example technique: Application of participation techniques with political support to delegate power.

Providing information in a limited manner with the onus often placed on the community to respond; e.g. Posters and leaflets. Example techniques: Public meeting, Survey.

Solving problems in partnership with community; e.g. formal partnership. Example techniques: Co-option, Stakeholder groups, Design game.

Inviting communities/interested parties to draw up proposals for Government/agency consideration; e.g. Community Councils. Example techniques: Citizens' Juries, Planning for Real.

Government/agency actively discussing issues and current thinking with community/public prior to taking action; e.g. liaison with interest groups. Example techniques: Citizens panels, Focus groups, User panels.

Having a customer-orientated service; e.g. introducing a customer care policy. Example techniques: Comment cards, Complaint forms, One-to-one interviews.

EMPOWERMENT — ENTRUSTED CONTROL, INDEPENDENT CONTROL, DELEGATED CONTROL

INFORMATION — MINIMAL COMMUNICATION, LIMITED INFORMATION, GOOD QUALITY INFORMATION

PARTICIPATION — LIMITED DECENTRALISED DECISION MAKING, PARTNERSHIP, EFFECTIVE ADVISORY BODY

CONSULTATION — LIMITED CONSULTATION, CUSTOMER CARE, GENUINE CONSULTATION

Heritage, Zoe and Mark Dooris (2009" "Community Participation and Empowerment in Healthy Cities." *Health Promotion International,* Vol. 24 No. S1

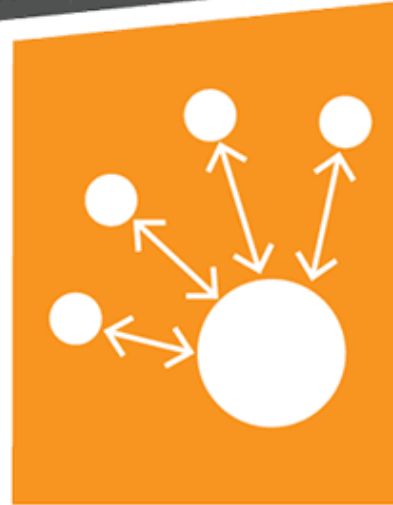DEGREE OF DIFFICULTY AND PUBLIC IMPACT

INFORM
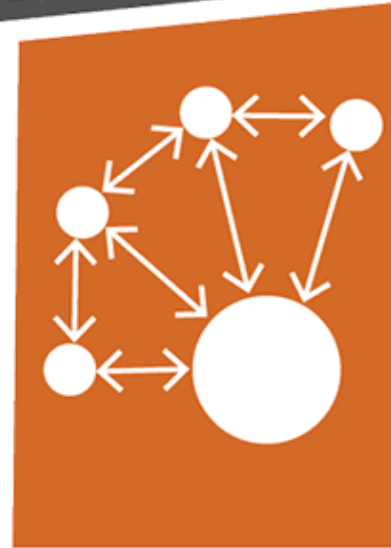provide balanced, objective info that the public should know and act on

CONSULT
obtain and consider feedback or input on issues, ideas, and decisions

INVOLVE
work with the public to understand the issues and problems and include in identifying options for moving forward

COLLABORATE
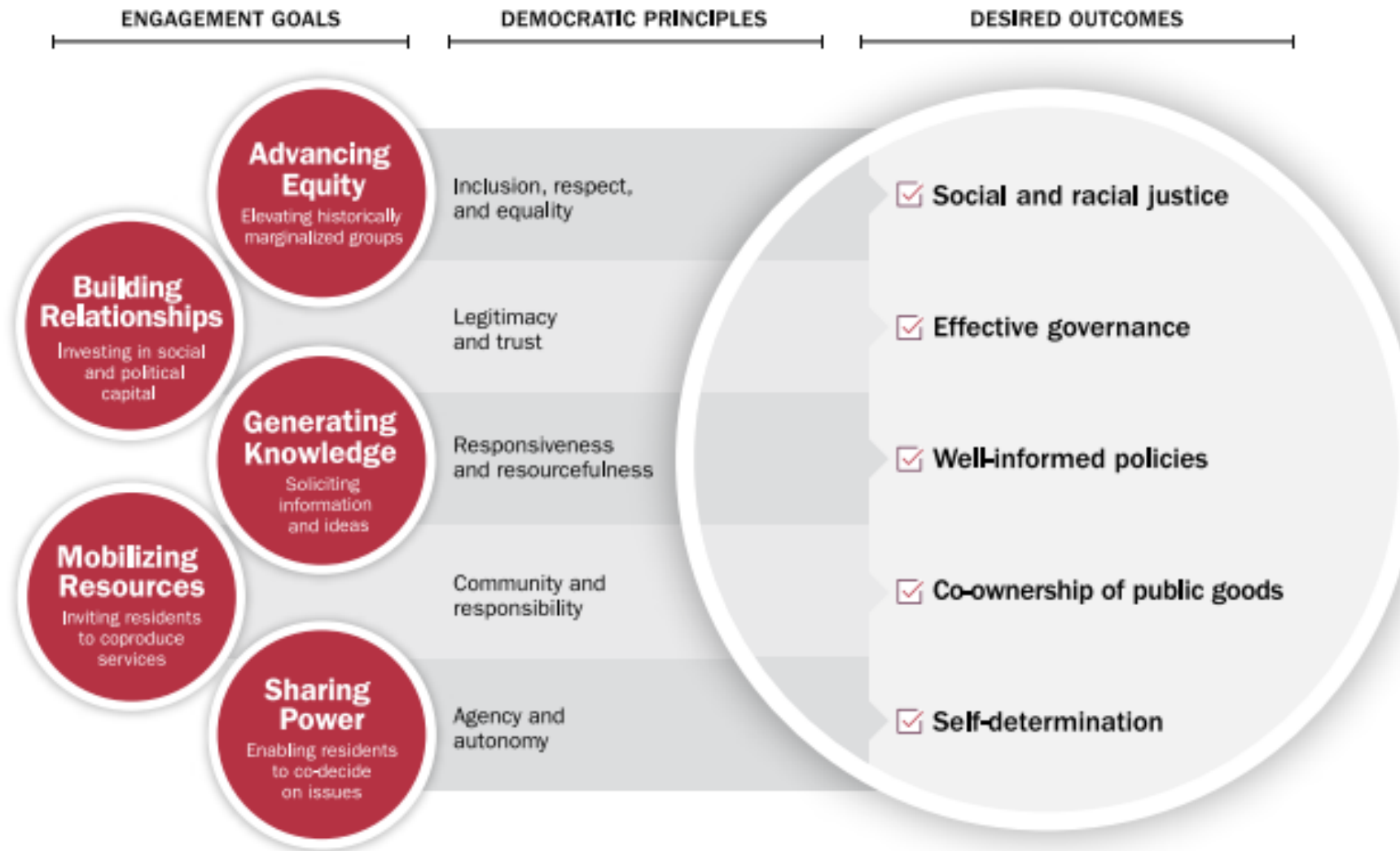partner with the public, seeking advice and innovations that become embedded as much as possible in decisions made

EMPOWER
final decisions are made by the public and are one of the players implementing them

McCloskey, D. J., McDonald, M. A., Cook, J., Heurtin-Roberts, S., Updergrove, S., Sampson, D., Gutter, S., & Eder, M. (2011). "What Is Community Engagement?" In *Principles of Community Engagement.* NIH. https://catalyst.harvard.edu/

Figure 1
Five Democratic Goals of Civic Engagement

Section Title	Process	Framing Questions
Part I: Self-Assessment	**Understanding Your Context:** Historical self-assessment	What have our civic engagement efforts looked like in the past? Why have some of our city's past civic engagement efforts been unsuccessful?
	Identifying Strengths and Areas for Improvement: Development rubric	What does our civic engagement look like today? What are our goals, motivations, and rationales for engaging? Where should we focus our efforts in order to improve?
Part II: Promising Practices	**Exploring the Framework:** Examples of civic engagement efforts	What does successful engagement look like? What practices have other cities successfully implemented and what informed their design choices?
Part III: Designing Your Civic Engagement	**Using the Framework:** Planning and aligning your design	How can my city apply this design framework to build a custom engagement plan? How can we increase the likelihood that the design achieves the desired outcomes, including equitable representation?
Part IV: Implementation and Evaluation	**Implementing Your Design:** Understanding challenges, iterating, and learning	How can we overcome common roadblocks and challenges? What tools and tactics will advance our goals? What can we do to harness digital technology, counter misinformation, and build and maintain trust internally and externally? How can we track progress and measure success?

BLOOMBERG HARVARD | City Leadership Initiative

City Leader Guide on Civic Engagement

Designing Pathways for Participatory Problem-Solving

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1. The appropriateness and effectiveness of the public involvement process design and implementation, including the participants' satisfaction with the process. Did the chosen process or approach fit the problem, and was it done well?

2. The real impacts on public decisions, policies and actions. Were the ultimate decisions different — and better — than would otherwise have been the case?

3. The effect on the community's capacity for democratic participation. Has the public involvement process made it more or less likely that the necessary information, skills and willingness to get involved are present in the community?

4. How, if at all, has a particular public participation effort enhanced a local agency's ability to effectively sustain and support civic engagement? Was the public engagement process considered a one-time affair, or have sponsors used it to build a more sustained capacity for soliciting the public's ideas and recommendations?

CIVIC PARTICIPATION

December 1, 2008 | Special Series | Terry Amsler

Measuring the Success of Civic Participation

Best Practices in Engagement for Civic Participation

Participatory Budgeting

Smart Public Spaces

Citizen Science Projects

Digital Town Halls

Open Data Platforms

Community-Led Dialogue

Surveys and Focus Groups

Short Term Task Forces

Crowdsourced City Planning

Smart Transportation Systems

Interactive Public Art

Neighborhood Apps/Community Portal

Community-Based Participatory Research and semi-directive interviews

St. Louis, MO
Population: **318,172**

St. Louis involves 16,000+ residents in the allocation of...

Faced with the daunting task of allocating $250 million as part of the Rams settlement fund, the City of St. Louis and the Board of Aldermen...

Read more →

Cambridge, UK
Population: **145,700**

Cambridge City Council analyzes input 50% faster with...

Cambridge experienced first-hand the power of Go Vocal's AI assistant in the analysis of open-ended text responses during their Design Code consultati...

Read more →

Copenhagen, Denmark
Population: **647,509**

How Copenhagen got 12,000 residents to participate in larg...

In August 2023, the City of Copenhagen took a bold step forward on their participatory democracy journey with a new community engagement initiative...

Read more →

Multiple cities

INJUV empowers 28,250 millennials to discuss...

INJUV, Chile's National Youth Institute, is a public institution that collaborates with the government in designing policies related to youth affairs....

Read more →

Leuven, Belgium
Population: **101,000**

Over 3,000 residents contribute to Leuven's multi-annual plan

The Flemish city of Leuven (101,000 inhabitants) has made the leap towards citizen participation! During this first project on the city's strategic pl...

Read more →

Newham, UK
Population: **300,000**

How the London Borough of Newham used community...

With around 300,000 residents, Newham is one of the biggest and most diverse boroughs in London, so it should be no surprise that it's not new to...

Read more →

Source: Citizen Lab
https://www.govocal.com/case-studies